A program note on "Nju", and on Paul Czinner, written for this film society by Mr. Kink Bond, one of the foremost authorities on the German film.

Direction by Paul Czinner; photography by Axel Granitzkaer and R. Kuntz; script by Czinner from a play by Osip Dymow; production by Rimax, 1924; approximate length: 7000 feet.

Cast: Elisabeth Bergner as Nju (Nura); Emil Jannings as the Husband; Conrad Veidt as the Stranger; Maria Furd as the nurse; Mila Edwall as the child.

The original play "Nju" by Dymow appeared in Russia in 1908. Dymow at that time was a young Russian writer of impressionistic plays and tales, and "Nju", his best-known play, was written more or less under the influence of Chekhov. Called "An everyday tragedy", it is a simple, rather short picture of the tangled personal fortunes of three people, which ends with the suicide of the woman and the faint, fleeting suggestion that the stranger she has loved will shortly be involved with another woman. It is Chekhovian in its mixture of tragic and comic nuances, though perhaps at this distance rather slender on the whole.

Paul Czinner made the film for the independent firm of Rimax in Berlin, and the film opened at the Alhambra Palast in Berlin on November 21, 1924. It was Czinner's first film and "Elisabeth Bergner's first important film. A month before, "die Bergner" had opened in her great success, Shaw's "St. Joan", at Reinhardt's Deutsches Theatre. In the Berlin film world almost exactly a month later "The Last Laugh" opened at the UPA Palast-am-Zoo.

Originally the film carried the subtitle "A Misunderstood Woman". It is remarkably faithful to the play, both in incident and in spirit. It is the story -- the story which was to be the prototype of later Czinner-Bergner films -- of the woman married to a kind but insensitive man, of her meeting with a romantic stranger who can give her the love and understanding she desires, and of the inevitable complications that follow. In the film as in the play, the woman kills herself and the stranger remains.
The film has been through the years one of the classic examples of the German "kammerspiel" films of the silent days. Kalmar, for instance, groups it with the other famous films, "Shattered", "Backstairs", "New Year's Eve", "The Street", "Warning Shadows", but notes that in contrast to most of the kammerspiel films, it does have subtitles. Many critics have written about the film.

It would perhaps be unfair to say that it does not really deserve all the acclaim it has received. It seems only just to point out, however, that the film itself does seem to have a quiet, even conventional treatment that makes it a bit hard to consider it a very great film. Czinner had been something of a dramatist - not many film directors have been writers of plays - this was his first film, and this lack of feeling for the new medium perhaps shows itself. Kreisauer has noted that it is only in the last five minutes that Czinner does very much with the closeup. Within its limits, "Nru" is certainly well made. It is an intelligent, literate, moving film, but it seems to lack the filmic imagination that would make it a great film. But it was successful when it came out in Germany. Fred Hildenbrandt in the Berliner Tageblatt praised it warmly as an "important success", and praised Bergner and Jannings, though he had reservations about Veldt. It met with less success over here. Saddled with the title "Husbands and Lovers" and cut by about half-a-real, it played at the Cameo in New York for one week, and was praised for its acting but roundly criticized for its production by the Film Daily. It might be added that the Film Daily also had reservations about Veldt, saying that he "overacts slightly". As a staunch Veldt fan I am putting this in merely for the record.

One interesting point about the film is that according to von Montagu in Cinema Quarterly, it was "Nru" in particular which helped in the founding of the Film Society in London. Montagu, it seems, was in Berlin with two other Englishmen that fall of 1924 and among other films saw "Nru". As they journeyed back to England they talked about this, and the plan of a Film Society slowly began to evolve. Soon afterwards the Society was a reality.

I have said that this was Elizabeth Bergner's first important film. She made about this time at least one other film, "Der Evangelist" ("The Evangelist"), a drama made by the Danish director Holger-Madsen, in which the already famous star had a secondary part apparently as an old lady.

For Jannings and Veldt the film has a certain significance in that - at least after very early days -- this is the only film in which they actually played together. They are both in "Haxorte", but in different stories. And I believe they are both in "Liebe Nacht Blind" ("Love Makes Us Blind"), but either one is the other simply appears briefly as himself in a story of film studio life.

Without attempting a serious "filmography" it may be useful to put down briefly the films Czinner has made, relatively few as they are. These are -- with one remarkable exception -- "Nru" (1924); "He Violinist of Florence" (1925); "Lova" (from a Balza story) (1927); "Dona Juana" (1928); "Præulein Else" (1926); "Ariane" (1931); "Nila" (or "Dreining Lips", 1932); "Catharina the Great" (1934); "Raspe ma Neva" (1935); "As You Like It" (1935); "Dreining Lips" (remake, 1937); "Stolen Life" (1939); and the two films he has recently made for Captain L.R. Maxwell, "Don Giovanni" (now playing in New York) and "Cissel", both of these last two being films made of stage performances. Of the others, the first five are silent (through "Præulein Else"); the rest sound, and apart from the final two, all have had Elizabeth Bergner as the star.

The one exception to this list is a film Czinner made in England in 1929 with Pola Negri. Since it is virtually unknown and has a rather fascinating history, a few words may be welcome. At a time when many German film people were working in England (Rubin, Dupont, Galsen, Freund, Eichberg, to name only the most important), Czinner went to England and in the late Spring and Summer of 1929 made a film which was officially known as "The Woman He Scorned". The interiors were shot at Elstree with a certain degree of secrecy. No title was given out at first. It was merely announced that Pola Negri - Madame Negri at the studio and Worvik Ward would star. Later exteriors were shot in and around a village in Cornwall. The producer was an independent English producer, Charles Whittaker. It was apparently shot entirely as a silent film, but when it was given a trade show it was an "all-talking" film.

Today's Cinema News reviewed it at the time of the trade show in May, 1930. They describe it as a "romantic melodrama" dealing with a reformed prostitute, a crook, and a sadist lighthouse-keeper. The Czinner triangle
situation is evident, but the story seems much more violent than one would ever expect from Czinner. The woman kills herself, the crock (who roughly corresponds to the Lover, and is played by Ward) dies from a fall over the cliffs, and the light-house keeper, who is also the husband (played by Hans Reinmann) is left to mourn the "woman He So Corneal. The reviewer notes the "slow development and unessential details" but praises the fine natural scenery.

The reviewer of Today's Cinema News also speaks of "the lengthy sequences of monosyllabic conversation and of utter silence" and expresses some scepticism as to the origin of the words supposedly spoken by the players. By the end of the year, "Warwick Ward had had a favorable settlement of a suit against Whittaker and Warner Brothers, the distributors, for an injunction to restrain the defendants from using his name in conjunction with the film. He contended that not only had the defendants added spoken dialogue to a silent film, but that they had used an "inferior" voice for himself.

The film was reviewed by the censor in Germany under the title "The Street of Lost Souls" -- at a time when there seem to have been four or five films in one country or another with very similar titles. Whether the film was finally shown publicly or not -- anywhere -- I do not know. Under the circumstances it seems at least possible that it was not.

We cannot know without seeing the film, but it seems reasonable to suppose that, despite the curious history and the appalling title, it is as good Czinner as the other films.

At all events, it should be known to all who care for old films. I hope that this little footnote will help to carry that out.

In conclusion it should be mentioned that Elisabeth Bergner made one more film. This is "Paris Calling", directed by Edwin L. Marin for Universal, and released in 1941.

Kirk Pend.

These notes are issued as a supplement to our regular notes for February; notes on the shorts in our supporting program tonight will be found in those regular notes.